

## ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

**rhythm:** pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in poetry

**meter:** repetition of a regular rhythmic unit in poetry

**foot:** each unit of meter; consists of a combination of stressed and unstressed syllables

**scan:** note the stressed and unstressed syllables in poetry

## HERE'S HOW

**Step 1: Read the poem aloud.** Listen for strong and light sounds.

**Step 2: Scan, or mark, the poem to identify meter.** Mark a **stressed** syllable with the symbol ( / ). For an **unstressed**, or short, syllable, use the symbol ( ~ ). Every line of a poem may not have the same meter. Scan enough of the poem to see the overall pattern. Choose the meter that is most used.

**Step 3: Identify type of metrical foot.** There are four different types of metrical feet. The **two** most common are as follows:

- **Iamb, or iambic foot:** an **unstressed** ( ~ ) followed by a **stressed** ( / ) syllable. Iambs ( ~ / ) are the most common meter in English poetry.

**EXAMPLE** Can you hear how the meter imitates the rhythm of speech?

The far|mer in | the dell.

- **Trochee, or trochaic foot:** a **stressed** followed by an **unstressed** syllable ( / ~ ). Many nursery rhymes use trochees in their first lines because of their singsong rhythm.

**EXAMPLE** Picture jumping rope or bouncing a ball to this rhythm.

Mary, | Mary, | quite con|trary

- **End of a trochaic line:** Poets often end a trochaic line with a half-foot to accent the poem's rhyme. Note the single stressed syllable at the end of each line in the poem below.

**EXAMPLE**

Safe up|on the | solid | rock the | ugly | houses | stand:

Come and | see my | shining | palace | built up | on the | sand!

## STUDENT LESSON SUMMARY , CONTINUED

**Step 4. Analyze effects of rhythm and meter:** The rhythm of a poem can sometimes communicate as much as the lines themselves. When reading a poem, ask yourself: How do the rhythm or meter

- make the poem more musical or memorable?
- enhance meaning by echoing sounds in the poem?
- convey a mood, tone, or atmosphere?
- stress key words and ideas (especially if there are breaks in the meter)?